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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
FS-390

"Remember—Only You..."

1944 to 1984

Forty Years of Preventing Forest Fires

Smokey's 40th Birthday

August 1984

The Story of Smokey Bear

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no 390

During the Second World War, a Japanese submarine shelled the Southern California coast, and forestry officials were afraid that future attacks might start widespread forest fires. The Government was alerted to the danger to its national forests. Because of this, the Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention campaign was organized by the USDA Forest Service.

The campaign needed to take its message directly to the American people, so the supervisor of the Angeles National Forest contacted the newly formed Wartime Advertising Council, and asked for their advice. The Council agreed to help. Foote, Cone & Belding of Los Angeles (now Foote, Cone & Belding/Honig) became the volunteer advertising agency.

At first, during 1942 and 1943, wartime slogans were used on forest fire prevention posters. Then Walt Disney's Bambi was used on a 1944 poster. And the little deer proved very popular with the public. After Bambi's success, the Forest Service and the Wartime Advertising Council decided to choose their own animal to represent forest fire prevention. In a Forest Service letter of August 9, 1944, Richard Hammett described the agreed-on animal: a bear. This bear was to have a "nose short (Panda type), color black or brown; expression appealing, knowledgeable, quizzical; perhaps wearing a campaign (or Boy Scout) hat that typifies the outdoors and the woods."

Albert Staehle, an artist who painted cocker spaniels for national magazine covers, was asked to paint the first bear. The first poster showed the bear pouring water on a campfire. This was printed in 1944 and distributed in early 1945. The bear was named "Smokey" after "Smokey Joe" Martin, who was the Assistant Chief of the New York City Fire Department from 1919 to 1930.

When the war was over, the Wartime Advertising Council was renamed The Advertising Council. But they continued to sponsor public service campaigns, including Smokey Bear's message. The famous message "Only YOU Can Prevent Forest Fires," was created in 1947. It is still in use today. In a recent study, 95 percent of the people surveyed could finish the sentence when given the first words, "Remember, only YOU _____." The same survey found 98 percent of the people could identify Smokey Bear from his picture.

By 1952, Smokey Bear had become so well known that his image needed protection by law. So Congress passed the Smokey Bear Act. The Act did several things: 1) It prohibited the use of Smokey Bear without the permission of the Forest Service; 2) It permitted the Forest Service to license the use of Smokey Bear and collect royalties; and 3) It allowed the Forest Service to keep the royalties and put them into a fund to be used only for forest fire prevention. The Act also prohibited the wearing of a Smokey Bear costume without permission.

The first, living symbol of Smokey Bear had known first-hand the tragedy of forest fires. In 1950, someone was careless with a match, cigarette, or campfire on the Lincoln National Forest in New Mexico. This carelessness started a devastating forest fire. After the flames passed and the smoke cleared, the only living thing the firefighters saw was a badly burned cub clinging to a blackened tree. The little bear was taken to a ranger station, where many people tended his burns and nursed him back to health. They called the cub "Smokey" after the original famous poster Smokey Bear.

After the burns had healed, the little bear was sent to live at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Since his time, there has always been a living symbol of Smokey Bear. Over 3 million people each year visit the National Zoo where they can view this symbol of Smokey Bear.

The first Smokey Bear stuffed toy was made in 1952 by Ideal Toys. With permission from the Forest Service, a card was inserted with each toy, to be mailed to the Forest Service as an application to become a "Junior Forest Ranger." Children readily responded. By 1955 there were 500,000 Junior Forest Rangers.

Elementary school children were taken the message of Smokey Bear. State forestry people and Forest Service rangers visited classrooms, telling the students about forest fire prevention. Children were encouraged to write to Smokey for their very own Junior Forest Ranger Kit. By 1965, Smokey Bear was given his own ZIP code number—20252. Requests for Junior Forest Ranger Kits from children are still being sent to Smokey today.

Has all this effort to prevent forest fires had a result? In 1942 over 10 million acres of wildlands were burned. In 1981, only 3 million acres were burned. This is a savings of over $20 billion for the American taxpayers.

We still have a lot of work to do. There are children who need to hear and learn about Smokey Bear and his forest fire prevention message. And there are still people who need to be continually reminded of the need to prevent forest fires.

Remember, Only YOU Can Prevent Forest Fires.

For further information contact:

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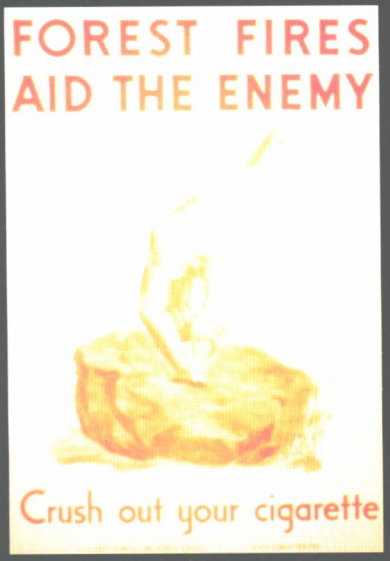
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 2417, Room 1001 RP-E
Washington, DC 20013
(703) 235-8160

"Remember— Only You..."

1944 to 1984 · Forty Years of Preventing Forest Fires · Smokey's 40th Birthday

1939



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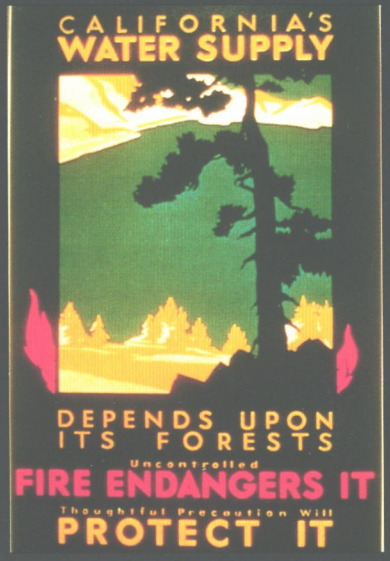
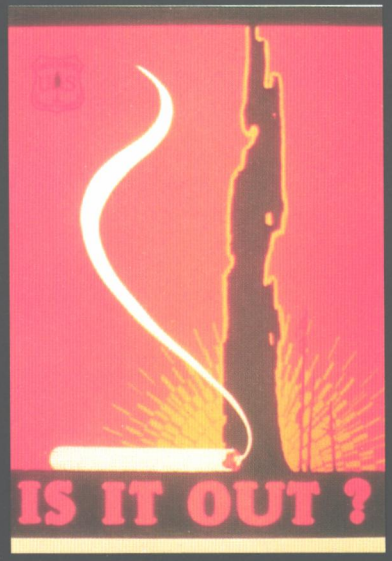
War Years

War Years

1943



War Years



War Years

War Years

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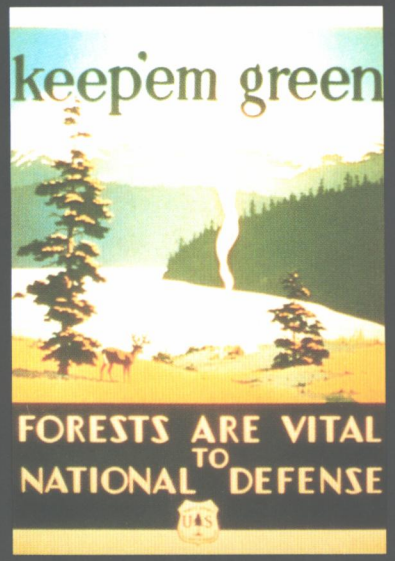

War Years

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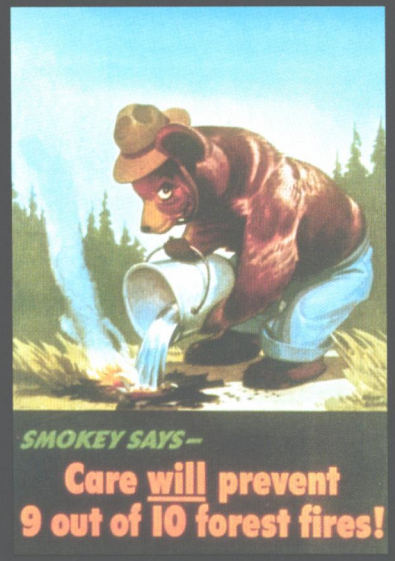

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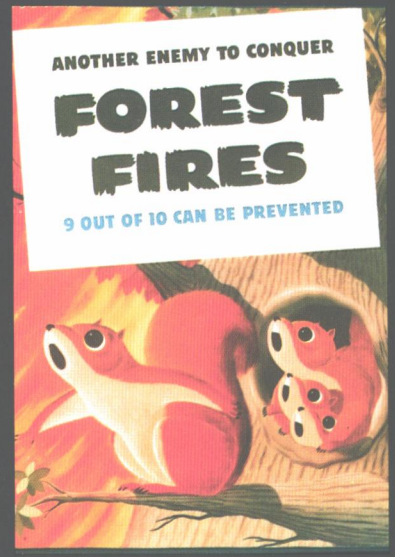

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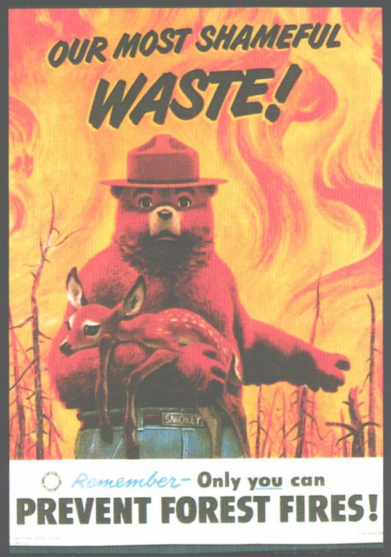

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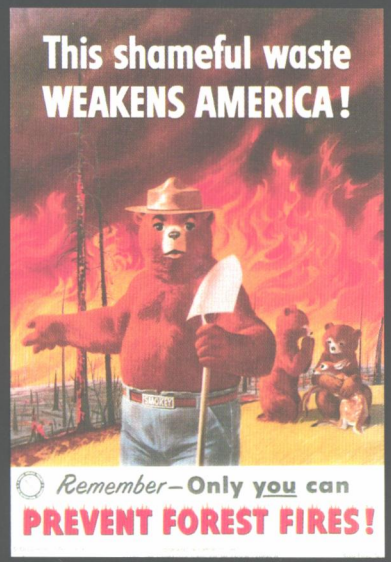

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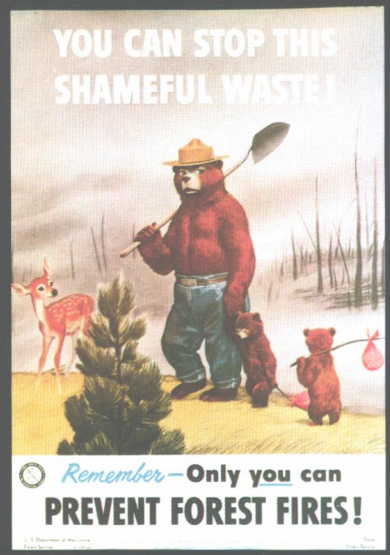

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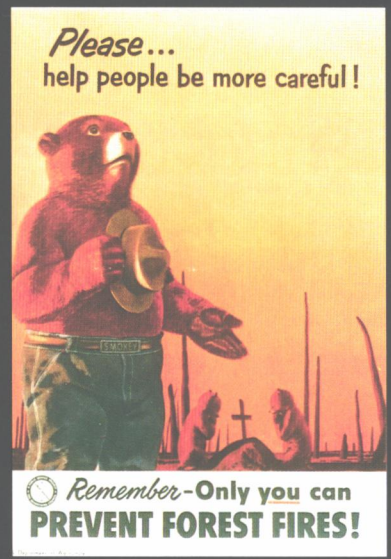

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1953

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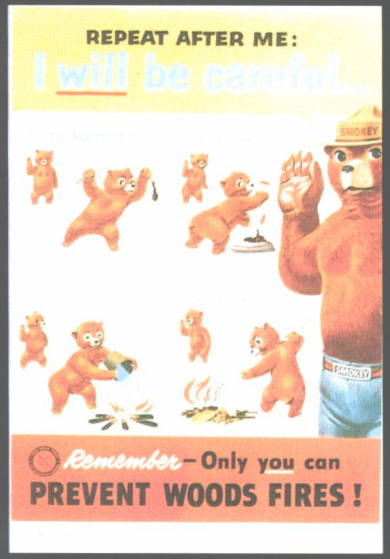

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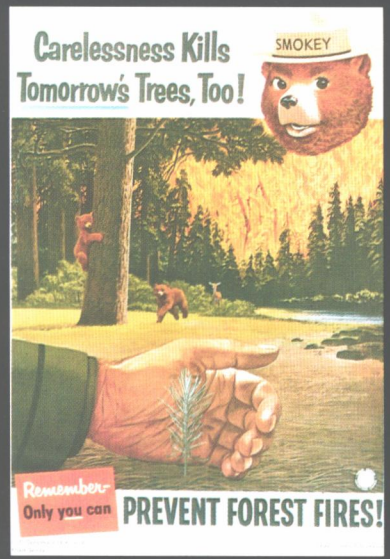

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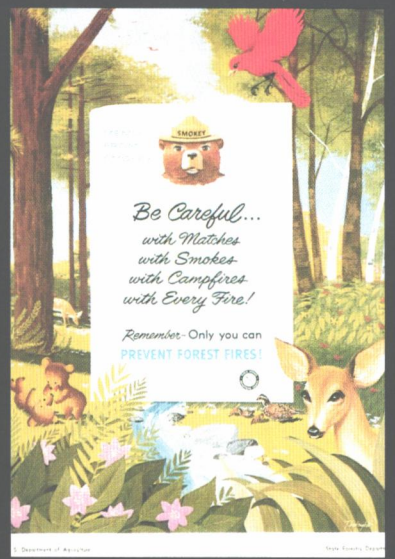

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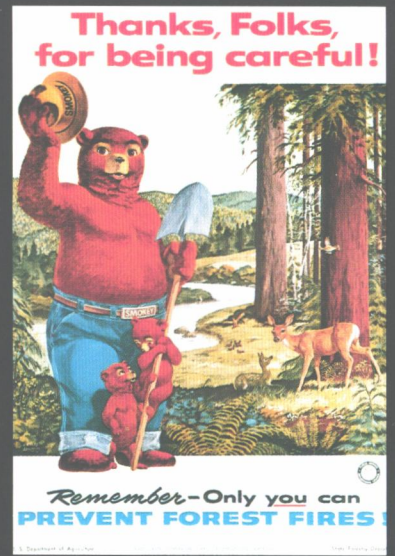

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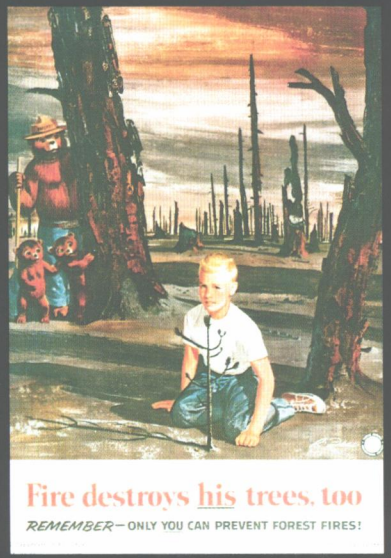

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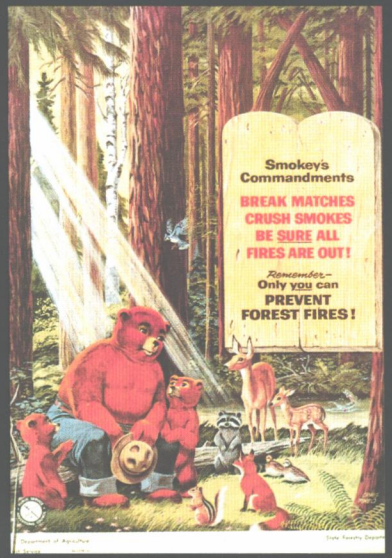

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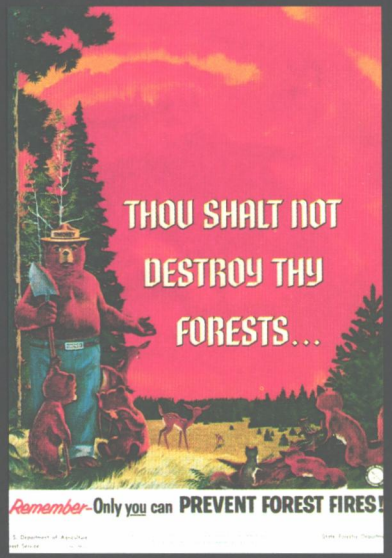

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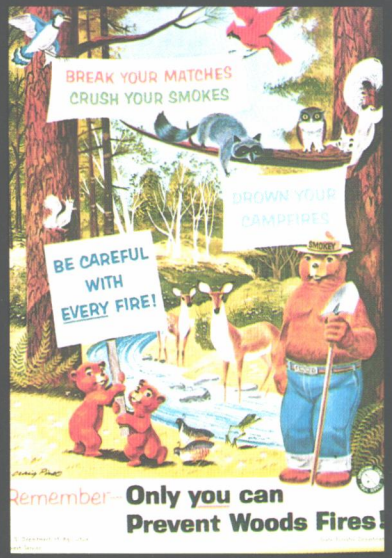

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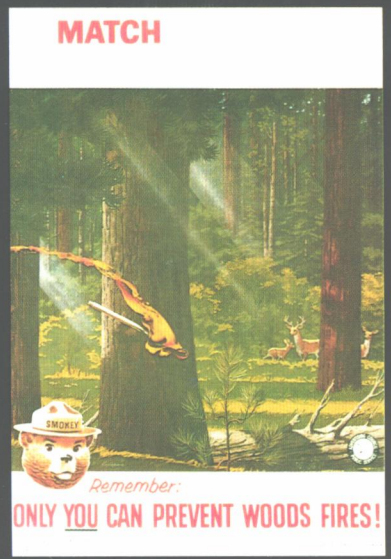

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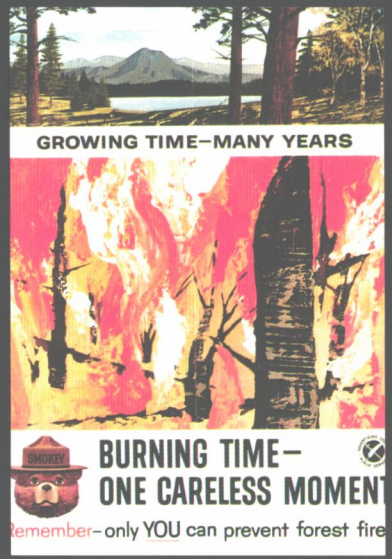

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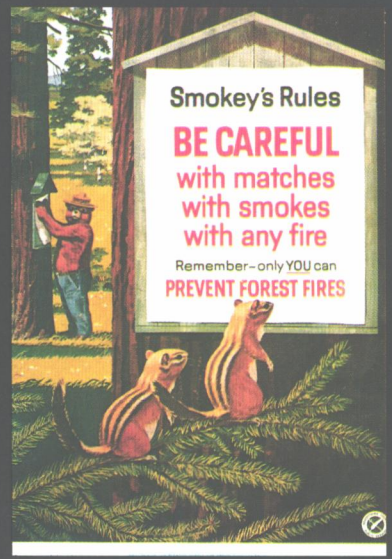

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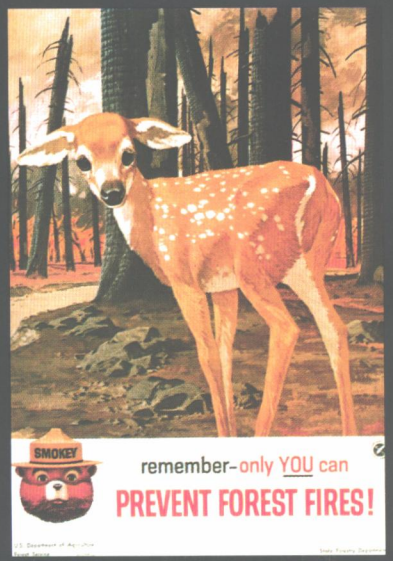

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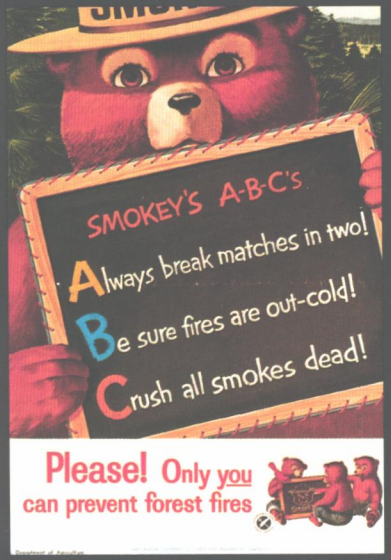

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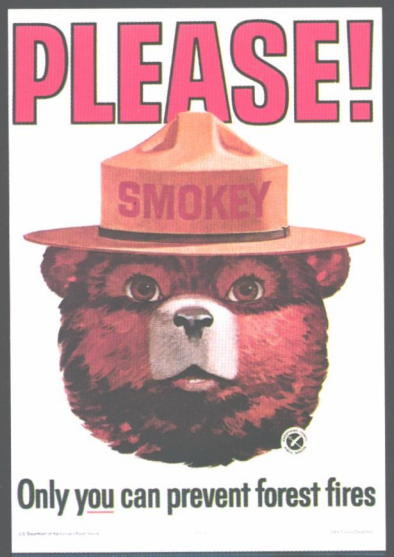

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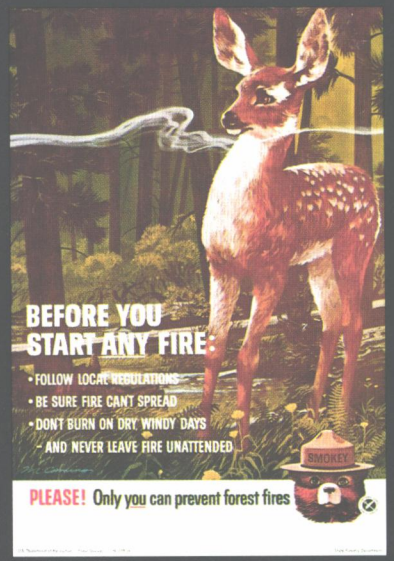
BEFORE YOU
START ANY FIRE:
• FOLLOW LOCAL REGULATIONS
• BE SURE FIRE CAN'T SPREAD
• DON'T BURN ON DRY WINDY DAYS
– AND NEVER LEAVE FIRE UNATTENDED
PLEASE! Only you can prevent forest fires

1965

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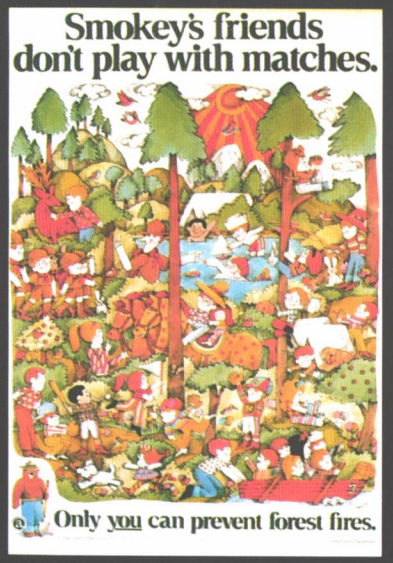
1966

1966



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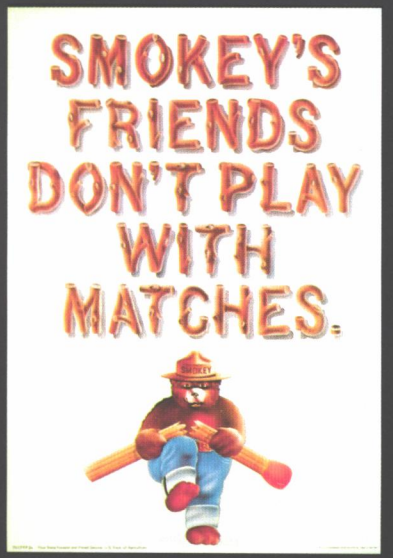

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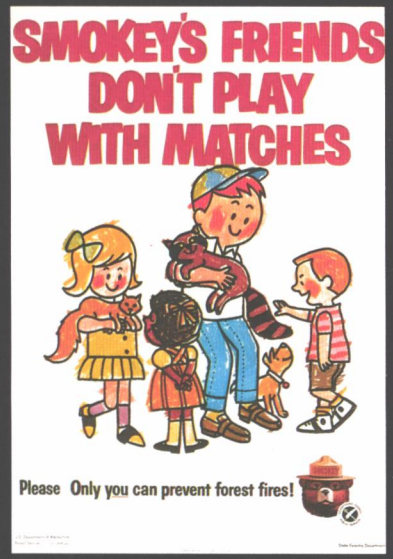

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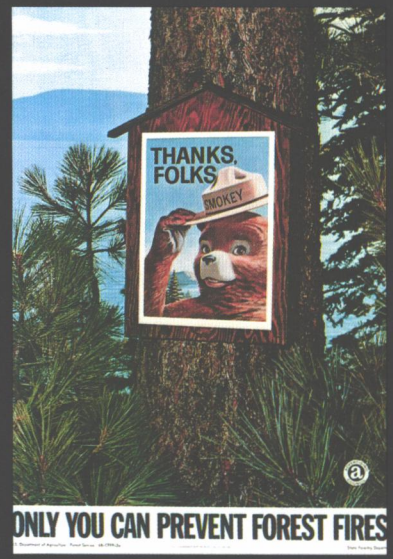

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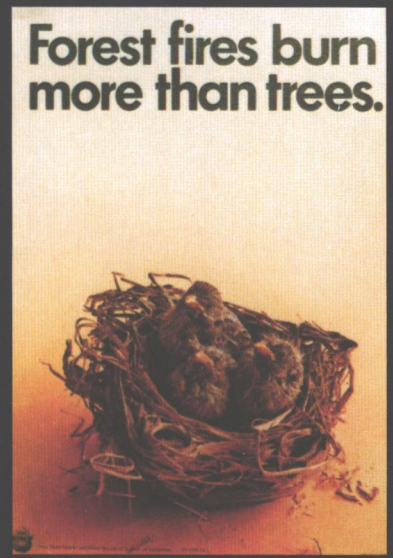

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1971

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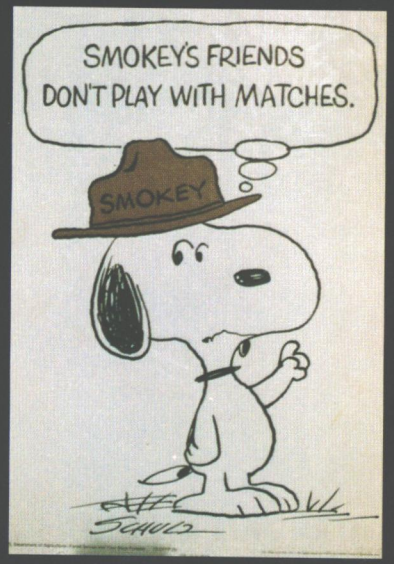

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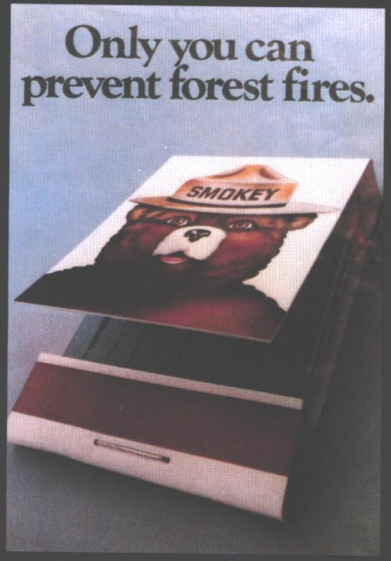

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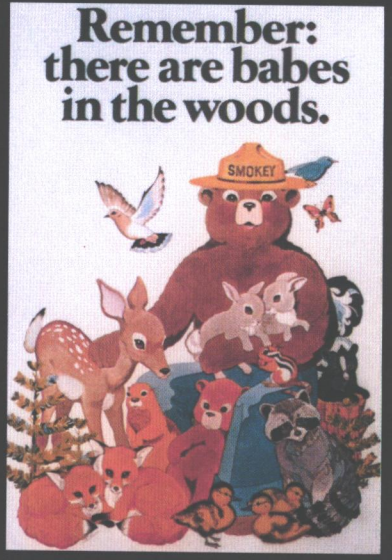

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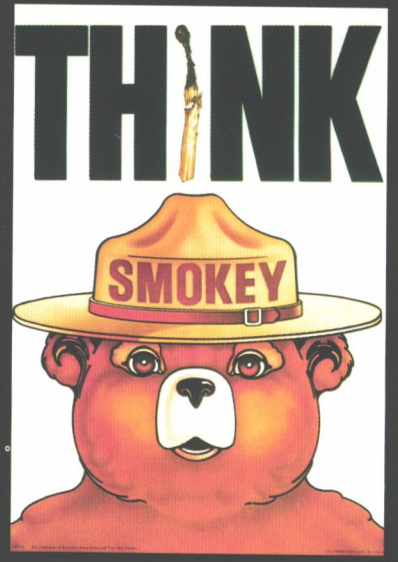

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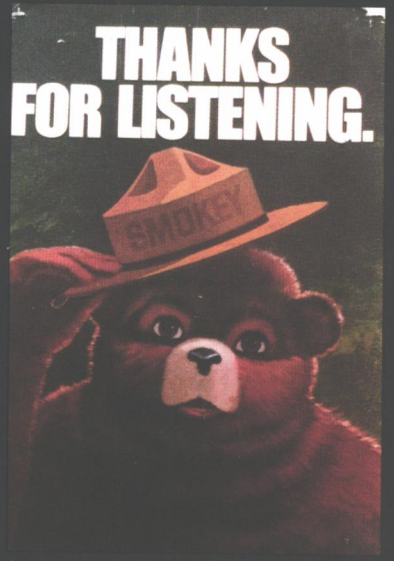

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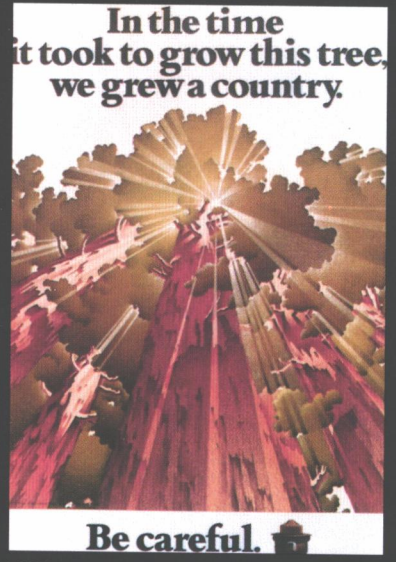

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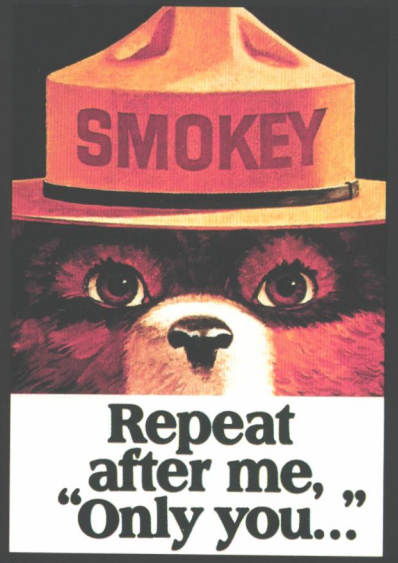

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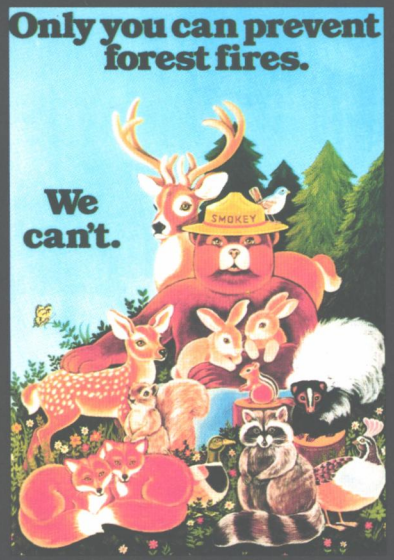

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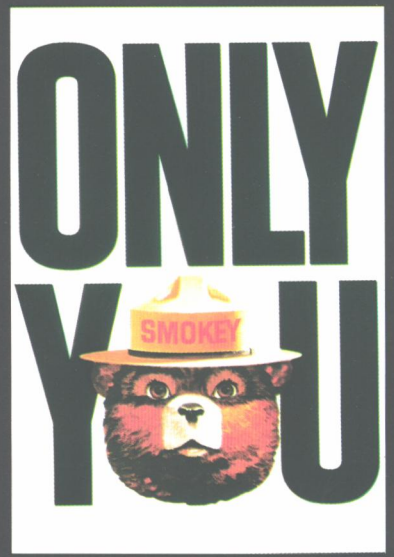

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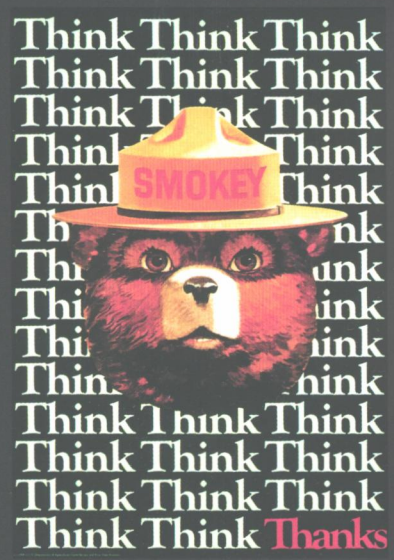

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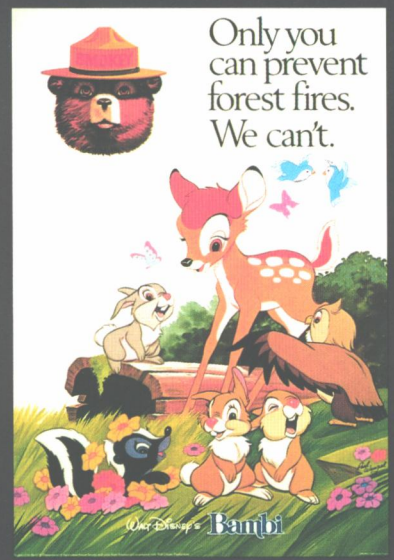

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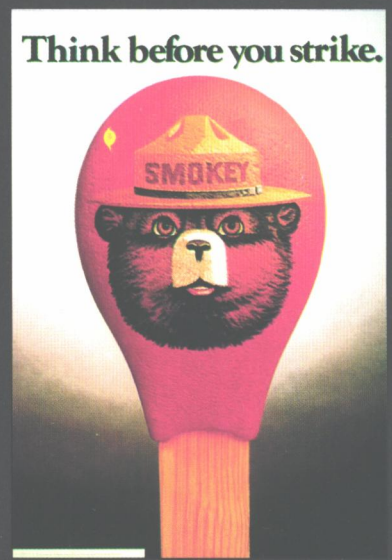

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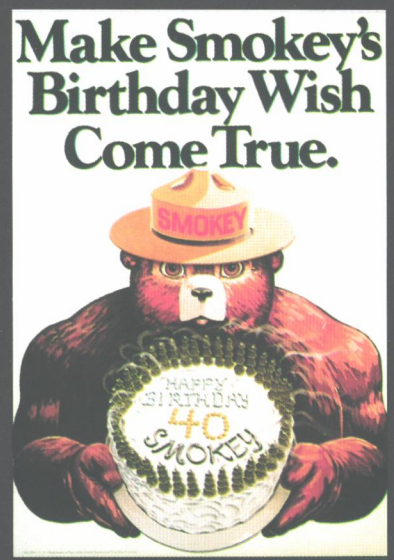

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